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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [XL](#)
SUBJECT: INSIDE CRICKET: ST. KITTS AND NEVIS POLITICAL
UPDATE

Classified By: CDA D. Brent Hardt, Reason 1.4 (b)

Summary

¶1. (C) A long-time member of the ruling St. Kitts and Nevis Labour Party (SKNLP), Dwyer Astaphan, recently resigned from the Douglas administration, opening the door for the Concerned Citizen Movement (CCM) -- a Nevis-based party -- to play a kingmaker's role, possibly in coalition with the opposition. The CCM currently controls two of the three seats reserved for Nevis, with the third controlled by the weaker Nevis Reform Party (NRP). The Astaphan resignation left the closely contested district two on St. Kitts up for grabs with no clear front runner. Astaphan's resignation may play a crucial role when elections come due in October 2009. If the opposition People's Action Movement (PAM) can win four of the eight districts on St. Kitts, it would place CCM in a position to call the shots on government formation and possibly even place CCM up-and-comer Mark Brantley in the Prime Minister's chair. End summary.

Astaphan Resigns and Publicly Criticizes PM Douglas

¶2. (C) In July 2008, Dwyer Astaphan, a long time member of the SKNLP and elected representative from district two, resigned from the Douglas administration without explanation. Following his resignation from the government, Astaphan continued to serve in Parliament, and has been publicly criticizing PM Denzil Douglas, including making several calls for Douglas' resignation. Astaphan's chief complaint is that Douglas governs in a vacuum and his policies do not reflect the opinions of the government as a whole. Astaphan has claimed he is not seeking reelection, and the SKNLP is backing a new candidate, Marcella Liburd, as his replacement in St. Kitts' now strategically important district two, covering the capital city of Basseterre. Astaphan still enjoys overwhelming support in the constituency, and is campaigning against Liburd, threatening SKNLP's hold on the seat.

Predictions for the Next Elections

¶3. (C) St. Kitts and Nevis is comprised of 11 districts, and a party must win 6 districts in order to form a government and select a prime minister. Currently the SKNLP holds seven seats, the PAM one seat, the CCM two Nevis seats, and the NRP the third Nevis seat. A recent story in the St. Kitts and Nevis Sun outlined a possible victory scenario for the CCM in the next elections, and touted Mark Brantley as the next Prime Minister. Brantley, a member of the CCM, holds one of the three Nevis seats. The island of Nevis is an historic

stronghold for the CCM and the party is expected to retain two, and probably win all three, of the Nevis seats.

¶4. (C) The plot is more interesting on St. Kitts, where the eight districts are more hotly contested. The SKNLP is firmly entrenched in four districts, and the PAM is expected by local prognosticators to win three. This leaves district number two, Astaphan's former district, up for grabs. The SKNLP backed Marcella Liburd to replace Astaphan in district two, however Astaphan made it very publicly known that he does not support Liburd as his replacement. If the PAM can pull an upset in this district, PAM and SKNLP will be tied with four seats each and all eyes will turn to Nevis and the CCM. The CCM is expected to hold onto its two Nevis seats and wrestle the third away from the NRP. With no party winning sufficient seats to form a government, the CCM would then be in the catbird's seat to determine the makeup of a coalition government, and would also be able to make a bid for the Prime Minister's chair.

¶5. (C) In such a scenario, some are pointing to CCM up-and-comer Mark Brantley as a plausible PM candidate. Brantley, a University of the West Indies-trained lawyer, won his seat in August 2007 in a special election after the sudden death of Malcolm Guishard who held the seat previously. Brantley was immediately installed as the CCM's leader and quickly became critical of the Douglas Administration's economic policy, its handling of escalating crime, and relations between St. Kitts and Nevis. The outspoken Brantley is the strongest candidate in the CCM and would be the logical option if the CCM pushes for the Prime Minister's chair.

Comment

¶6. (C) The ruling SKNLP has been the strongest party in recent years, largely on the back of a string of good years for the economy. With the global recession placing increased pressure on local business, and with crime an increasing concern, the PAM and the CCM are mounting increasingly credible challenges. However, while Astaphan's resignation weakens SKNLP's position, a change in government is far from a done deal. Brantley is enjoying the spotlight, but he needs to win his district first, hope the SKNLP loses several seats on St. Kitts, form a coalition, and convince the coalition to install him as Prime Minister. Even in a perfect scenario for CCM, the top job may be too much of a demand for a junior coalition partner, but if this scenario plays out, the CCM would be able to extract a high price for its cooperation. While such a change in government dynamics would unlikely have a significant impact on relations with the U.S., it could provoke considerable change in the traditionally rocky relationship between the two islands in the federation, with Nevisian interests controlling federal government for the first time.

HARDT